

## Bound to Change: German Foreign Policy in the Networked Order

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*Article*

# Bound to Change: German Foreign Policy in the Networked Order

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## Abstract

What are the primary sources of power in the evolving international order? This paper argues that governments of rising regional powers increasingly engage in informal advocacy, mediation and substitution networks to pursue their interests in the multipolar system. It provides empirical evidence for this claim by illustrating how Germany, described by many as Europe's current hegemon, entered or established multilateral networks to ameliorate its negotiation position. As one of the world's most connected states, Germany found itself structurally bound to participating in and seeking to shape multiple informal institutions. Not only due to its lack of military power, Germany is thus likely to evolve into a state whose foreign policy effectiveness depends to a relatively large degree on its 'network power'. The peculiarities of its political system, its European socialization and increasing international demands for German diplomatic leadership present conducive conditions for Berlin to play a protagonist role in the networked world order.

## Keywords

International Order, Foreign Policy Networks, German Foreign Policy, Negotiations, G20

## Introduction

Continuity has been the key feature of German foreign policy for the last 60 years. Or as former foreign minister Klaus Kinkel put it, the most important foreign policy principles are "continuity, continuity, and continuity!" (Cit. in Sandschneider 2012, 5). This, above party line consensus, stands for the credibility, predictability and responsibility of the Federal Republic. Since then, in principle, all governments have referred to the continuity of the following threefold consensus

as the one and only alternative: (1) institutionalized multilateralism of a Europeanized Germany and embeddedness in the transatlantic alliance; (2) self-restraint in the pursuit of national interests, no unilateralism and no power projection; and (3) a civilian focus of foreign policy and the abandonment of military instruments to the greatest possible extent.

Today, the validity of many elements of this consensus is being challenged, and German foreign policy is adapting to the profound transformation of the global order. First, shifts of relative capabilities generated new power poles in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Second, the patterns of behavior and means of foreign policy enactment have changed dramatically. In the past decade, change and innovation in the meshwork of global politics have been induced through formal and informal sites of negotiation and by the establishment of intergovernmental clubs and foreign policy networks. Therefore, third, the procedural culture of international relations has fundamentally changed. The diplomatic culture of the networked world order is marked by an informal multilateralism, through which situational, policy-specific coalitions determine the outcomes of global bargains. And as a consequence of the latter, foreign policy is not exclusively made by diplomats anymore. The effects of globalization assign international dimensions to most issue areas and government departments.

The most visible efforts in adapting German foreign policy to these challenges can be seen in a range of strategy papers for different world regions (Asia, Latin America, and Africa) and diverse internationalizing policies (culture, science, technology and education). These concepts have been developed over the last few years in collaboration among multiple ministries and external experts. In 2013, the then-head of the Federal Foreign Office's policy planning staff highlighted the networking function of the ministry, enabling not only international linkages but also its role as a domestic coordination platform "providing a center in which various issue-specific policies would be bundled and integrated into a coherent foreign policy" (Bagger 2013). In 2015, then German foreign minister Steinmeier contended that while Germany's foreign policy would maintain its basic tenets such as the strong transatlantic alliance and a close German-French partnership within a united Europe, continuity would not suffice to adapt to key challenges of "crisis management, the changing global order, and our [German] position within Europe" (Steinmeier 2015). At the technical level, the Foreign Office established a new Dialogue and Information System (DILGIS) to promote a better internal coordination of different issue-specific cooperation projects with rising powers.

In addition, the Foreign Office coordinated consultations among 13 government departments that led to the announcement of a new approach toward the evolving international order in 2012. In that strategy paper entitled "Shaping Globalization: Expanding Partnerships, Sharing Responsibility" the German government

reaffirms the coordinates of its foreign policy: “Freedom and human rights, democracy and the rule of law, peace and security, prosperity and sustainable development, strong bilateral relations and effective multilateralism are the principles we seek to uphold when defining our goals” (Federal Foreign Office 2012, 6). In a nutshell, the government document heralds the continuity of these principles but a shift in approach. For instance, not only does it attempt to connect civilian identity with shifting international politics, it also responds to increasing expectations to take more global responsibility. The assumption is that, over time, more states and issues will become interconnected in networks of mutual dependence defined by accepted standards of behavior and shared expectations of peaceful change. Germany has initiated the founding of the Group of 20 (G20), has been among the largest donors to budgets of the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN), chaired the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2016, and became involved in institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Yet, beyond this engagement in International Organizations (IO) and international clubs, Berlin’s activities in interstate networks arguably make the key difference for its future ability in shaping the global order.

How can states such as Germany which exhibit relatively limited material resources impact the multipolar global order? This article approaches the question in two steps. Its first part develops the concept of ‘network power’ and discusses its relative advantage for understanding the changes in Germany’s evolving foreign policy approach. The second part illustrates the concept’s utility by examining the shape and consequences of Germany’s recent engagement in mediation, advocacy, and substitution networks. It concludes that the case of Germany demonstrates how a rising power with relatively limited material resources can exploit foreign policy networks to garner international legitimacy and bargaining power. Consecutive German governments in the 2000s have focused on interest-driven intergovernmental groups to pursue international goals. Both domestic constraints to use other power resources as well as the increasing importance of inter-state networks have facilitated this strategic choice, and brought Germany overall in a relatively favorable position to project its power at a global scale.

### **German Power in the Shifting Order: A Conceptual Framework**

Thinking about reunified Germany’s role in this shifting order has to start with its positioning in the global hierarchy of power. A structural account assumes that relative power resources set limits on state action before choice is driven by domestic variables or the constraints imposed by international institutions and, consequently, that foreign policy strategies must be consistent with the opportunities afforded by the international system (Zakaria 1992; Sperling 2001).

A short glance at Berlin's material capabilities shows relatively mediocre results. In terms of military resources, it operates no nuclear capabilities and has been reducing conventional-armament expenditure for the last twenty years, a trend that was only reversed in 2015 when defense minister Ursula von der Leyen announced that the Bundeswehr's overall budget and in particular spending on equipment and maintenance would be increased (Braw 2016). This trend will continue, particularly since the Trump administration stated at the February 2017 NATO summit that Washington's commitments in Europe will depend on the increase of defense spending by European NATO allies. This message delivered by Defense Secretary Mattis was directed mainly to Berlin, as Europe's biggest economy is still far from spending the agreed 2 percent of its GDP on defense.

Even though even though the merits of its often-praised and indeed successful export economy are based on a sound industrial fundament and relatively balanced public finances, this economic success story might be short-lived. Because the prospects of Germany's demographic shrinkage – in sharp contrast to demographic developments in India, Brazil and other rising economies – will likely reduce the German share of the global economy in the medium term. Therefore, even though its hard power deficiencies do not hinder Berlin to be one of the biggest contributors to the UN budget, Germany's classification as a great power largely lacks material substance (Schöllgen 2000; Gujer 2007).

Despite its limited material capabilities, Germany is facing growing external expectations to play a more active and a more robust international role. European observers consider Germany an "indispensable power" (Ash 2011). Public opinion attests to Germany's positive image, which according to a global survey of 16.000 people is perceived as the 'best country' ranked by global performance in areas such as entrepreneurship, cultural influence, business-friendly policies and economic progress (US News 2016). Its leader, Chancellor Angela Merkel, is perceived as the most trusted national leader on handling domestic and international affairs according to a study by Harvard University's Kennedy School and the 'Person of the Year 2015' according to Time Magazine (Saich 2014; Gibbs 2015). In 2011, then Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski reminded Berlin of its special responsibility in overcoming the European debt crisis, stating that he "fear[ed] Germany's power less than her inactivity" (Sikorski 2011; for a recent summary of the discussion on Germany's leadership in Europe, see Matthijs 2016). Moreover, Israeli deputy foreign minister Daniel Ayalon emphasized Germany's crucial role in the nuclear negotiations with Iran, demanding that Germany influences European states that import Iranian oil. None of those voices is suspect to argue against the background of historical amnesia. These positive perceptions and expectations reflect and increase the legitimacy of German foreign policy.

Legitimacy and confidence of others are ideational capabilities that impact the global power hierarchy (Nicholson 2015). The sources of Berlin's international recognition can be subsumed to the term "leading by example." Germany's ideational resources consist of representing general and widely shared values (such as multilateralism, democracy, and human rights) on the one hand, and its more specific and partly unique merits (coming to terms with its past, social market economy, cutting edge in green economy, industrial innovation, responsible budgetary policies and smart crisis management) on the other hand. Another example is Berlin's nonnuclear power status, which makes it more credible in lobbying for nonproliferation. Moreover, Germany's nuclear restraint legitimizes its claim for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in accordance with the argument that nonnuclear actors should also be represented in global security policy making.

In view of the superior military capabilities of the United Kingdom and France, a compilation of relative material and ideational resources still reflects a multipolar European system.<sup>1</sup> In fact, as Nicholson poignantly argues, while Germany has successfully expanded its 'soft power' capabilities, its government still has to narrow the gap between the hype about its might and actual foreign policy outcomes (Nicholson 2015). It is therefore surprising and seemingly inappropriate to describe Germany as Europe's new hegemon – even if the term "hegemon" is tempered with attributes like "reluctant" and "overstrained" (Paterson 2011; Klein-Brockhoff and Maull 2011). To explain this puzzling contradiction between ascribed roles and relative power status, an analysis of how power in general, and German influence in particular, is produced and projected in the multipolar order is needed. In this regard, we will argue in the following that the relative weight of different power types (e.g., material, ideational and institutional) is shifting in favor of those resources Berlin has at its disposal.

The increasing interdependence of states in dealing with the structural deficits of the global financial order and global climate issues reduces the relative significance of military capabilities in global politics. High levels of economic interdependence and, in particular, high expectations of future trade will foster peace (Copeland 1996). The likelihood of great-power wars in the upcoming multipolar order is low because the existing international order is more open, consensual, and rule-based than past international orders ever were. Thus, from the perspective of rising powers, it is easier to join and harder to overturn because they can gradually rise up through the hierarchies of international institutions – especially as the United States has not threatened the vital interests of rising powers (Iran is not considered part of this category) (Ikenberry and Wright 2008). From the

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<sup>1</sup> This is illustrated, for example, in surveys on systemic power concentration in Europe in 1985 and 1995 (Sperling 1999, 396–97)



perspective of the United States, it is also advisable to try to reform and consolidate formal institutions, thus enabling them to persist “after hegemony,” while also reflecting its own interests and values (Keohane 1984). Both causalities are not applicable to declining powers such as the Russian Federation, which can be expected to produce limited conflicts attempting to maintain at least parts of its former sphere of influence.

From a global perspective, the case of Russia demonstrates that military capabilities are still important, foremost in contributing to prevent great-power wars as vehicles of change. The distinct military supremacy of the United States would make it potentially very costly for any single great power or great-power alliance to take a stand against the dominant military power. In addition, because of the possession of nuclear weapons by all established (and some rising) powers, the violent redistribution of power might well be expected to be a zero-sum game. In short, change in the twenty-first century will not come about by military alliance building and great-power wars. Rather, it will be expressed through three parallel processes: (1) the gradual reform, if possible, of outdated formal institutions; (2) the subtle decrease of their significance if they prove to be resistant to reform; and (3) the emergence of network patterns resultant from the strategies and behaviors of state actors who have become discontent with the formalized status quo of the international system (Flesmes 2013, 1020).

Against this global background, some attempts to conceptualize German power seem to be more promising than others. The central power approach stresses Germany’s role as Europe’s most populated country in its geographical center, its bordering of nine states and its projection of power toward Eastern Europe (Volgy and Schwarz 1994; Baumann 2007). Besides its regional focus, the concept overlooks Germany’s prospective demographic development and stresses geographic variables that have lost ground in the course of economic, social and media globalization. Most importantly, the term “central power” wrongly suggests a high level of power concentration – as if Europe is marked by a unipolar structure. The trading power concept mono-causally focuses on economic resources and strategies (Rosecrance 1986; Staack, n.d.). Consequently, it also fails to provide an appropriate framework for analysing the interdependence of diverse global issue areas such as transnational terrorism, climate change and global health.

Other conceptualizations of power are more in line with the peculiar composition of German foreign policy resources as well as with the features of the shifting world order. First, the soft power approach is focusing on moral and intellectual leadership and, in particular on co-optive power, which is the ability to shape what others want (Nye 1990; 2004). Co-optive power rests on the attractiveness of one’s culture and values. Culture and values are not only projected by the German government, but also by nongovernmental organizations such as German

political foundations, the Goethe Institute, and the German Academic Exchange Service.

Second, the conceptual frameworks of middle and civilian powers promise a great deal of explanatory power for German foreign policy. The overriding goal of middle powers is the creation of global rules and international consensus. Accordingly, middle powers' foreign policy objectives overlap with the "civilian ends" of foreign policy, such as responsibility for the global environment and the diffusion of equality and justice (Duchêne 1973; Maull 1990). These are "milieu goals" rather than "possession goals," to use Arnold Wolfers' distinction – the latter further the national interest, while the former aim to shape the environment in which the state operates (Wolfers 1962, 73–74). Although, milieu goals may only be a means of achieving possession goals, they are also goals that transcend the national interest and are shared widely. In other words, a sense of "global responsibility" is present in the case of a middle power (Schoeman 2003, 351; For a critical view on the concept's utility to account for Germany's future foreign policy agenda, see Kappel 2014, 348–49). According to the behavioral definition, middle powers pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, tend to seek compromise positions in international disputes, and embrace notions of "good international citizenship" to guide diplomacy (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal 1991, 19).

Third, network power is a subcategory of institutional power focusing on how states project power through interest-driven foreign policy groupings characterized by the cooperative, repeated and enduring interactions among its member states (Katzenstein and Shiraishi 1997). Foreign policy networks lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve internal disputes. Network power increases with the location at the crossroads of various foreign policy networks, such as mediation, advocacy and substitution networks (Flemes 2013). In the current order, these comparative advantages increase not only with the number of network memberships, but also with the dissimilarity (clubs of established powers, emerging powers, developing countries and clubs of mixed membership) and the looseness of the different foreign policy networks. What ultimately governs international relations is not states, but the connectivity to which states are able to agree (Karp 2005, 71).

Foreign policy networks represent a specific mode of international interaction, which is grounded in three principles: (1) networks' member states are mutually dependent; (2) the ties between member states can serve as channels for the transmission of both material and nonmaterial products; and (3) persistent patterns of association among member states create structures that can define, enable or restrict their foreign policy behavior (Hafner-Burton and Montgomery 2006). Hence, network power that is most pronounced in advocacy networks is a product of the repeated experiences of cooperation and shared learning processes among



network partners, on the one hand, and comparatively greater reliability in the actions of and more familiarity with the policy-specific interests and strategies of their peers, on the other.

Against the conceptual background of co-optive, middle and network power, German foreign policy change is detected in the following by analyzing shifts and adaptations along one antithetic dimension that has been predominantly marked by continuity over the last six decades, namely the shift from a focus on institutionalized organizations toward a stronger engagement in intergovernmental networks. A complex interplay of external and domestic influence factors is conditioning the processes of change in this field, which constitutes one element of a broader reorientation of Germany's foreign policy.

### **New Multilateral Deal: From Institutions to Networks**

The global trend of increasing bilateralism applies to German foreign policy as well. And the old leitmotiv of cooperation through durable and institutionalized organizations is losing ground. One of the key elements of the civilian power concept refers to the willingness to develop supranational structures to address critical issues of international management (Mauß 1990, 93; see also Rosecrance 1986 on trading states). Still, it is argued that "Germany must transfer sovereignty to be able to exert influence", whereas others plead for a German multilateralism that is more flexible (Kleine-Brockhoff and Mauß 2011, 60; Sandschneider 2012, 8). The latter view is more instrumental in face of the decreasing significance of reform-resistant institutions that will potentially be challenged by intergovernmental network patterns in the middle-term.

From a global perspective, the paradigm of supra-nationalism always has been highly contested and the changing features of the global order reinforce this tendency. Against the background of globalization in general and the internationalization of formerly domestic policies in particular, the predominant majority of states are not only driven by their national interests, but also increasingly by domestic political calculation. This is not only because of the aforementioned reduced degree of elite autonomy in view of a more critical public, but also because the foreign policy elite itself is expanding with more diverse interests. Therefore, the challenge consists in pursuing national interests by seeking pragmatic solutions for emerging problems in repeated and punctual bargains.

The global system is indicative of the way being paved back to Westphalia (that is if it had ever actually been abandoned). This process is being spearheaded by China, Russia, India and Brazil, who are staunch guardians of the principle of national sovereignty – not least because of their national weaknesses and territorial vulnerabilities (i.e., Tibet, Chechnya, Kashmir and the Amazon). The rising

powers as well as the United States avoid institutionalized binding, let alone supranational treaties. Just as one cannot be a federalist on one's own, one cannot be a supranational institutionalist on one's own either.

In this setting Germany seems to follow a resocialization path in power-political terms as it seeks more power within multilateral institutions like the UNSC, while becoming less willing to transfer sovereignty to them (Hellmann 2004; Kundnani 2011, 35). The German claim to permanent representation in the UNSC gives direction to a new multilateral deal given that nondiscrimination and the indivisibility of rights and duties lie at the heart of orthodox multilateralism (Ruggie 1994). Undermining these principles instead of at least lobbying for a European seat reflects the *modus operandi* of *realpolitik* as alien to civilian power.

Instead of a European initiative, Germany preferred to channel its candidacy through an intergovernmental network based on common interests. The G4 lobby with Brazil, India and Japan mainly aims to improve its members' positions in the international power hierarchy, but bases its claim on a civilian power discourse that advocates good global citizenship, solidarity and the diffusion of equality and justice.

The blueprint of network strategies has been delivered by Brazil, China, India, and South Africa. Their approach is reflected in their omnipresence on the global stage in flexible coalitions (e.g., BRICS, IBSA and BASIC), all of which are characterized by a low degree of institutionalization (G3, G5 and O5 of the Heiligendamm process). This network strategy guarantees a maximum of national sovereignty, flexibility and independence to the rising powers' foreign-policy makers. The soft balancing behavior of those state actors discontented with the status quo institutions has brought forth an incremental reform of the international order. One of the most fundamental changes induced by these innovators has been a change in the procedural culture of international relations. What has consequently emerged is a *zeitgeist* of multilateral informality (Flemes 2013, 1022).

The BRICS format demonstrated how establishing alternative platforms impacts global institutions pushing for the reform of global financial institutions. At the first summit in Russia in 2009, the then BRIC countries advocated for a reform of the IMF voting quota system. In 2010 at the G20 meeting in South Korea the finance ministers and central bank governors of the G20 agreed on a shift in country representation at the IMF of six percent in favor of dynamic emerging markets, which moved the BRIC countries up to be among the top ten shareholders of the IMF.

In comparison with the BRICS states, Berlin's network diplomacy in both number and protagonism of promoted global foreign policy networks is still under-

developed, though evolving. The new playing fields of German foreign policy can be distinguished in mediation, advocacy and substitution networks (Flesmes 2013, 1023–27).

First, mediation networks such as the Middle East Quartet and the Six-Party Talks on North Korea tackle global security issues. The established great powers have so far successfully defended these last exclusive domains of high politics. However, the inclusion of Germany in the P5-plus-1 group on the Iranian nuclear issue portends the demise of these prerogatives. The P5-plus-1 exemplifies how mediation networks can successfully downgrade global security threats. Most importantly, Germany played a key role in promoting mediation networks in order to resolve the Ukraine crisis, respectively the conflict between Kiev and Moscow. Foreign minister Steinmeier started a trilateral initiative with his French and Polish colleagues to stop violence at the Maidan in February 2014. Another example is the OSCE roundtable format chaired by German Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger to incent the dialogue between the parties of the Eastern Ukrainian conflict (Nüstling 2014). In general, the government of Chancellor Merkel conducted the European reactions to President Putin's Ukraine policies and determined the rhythm of international sanctions against Russia. Starting by moderating the EU's position after the shooting of flight MH17 in July 2014, Angela Merkel changed her tone in a speech after a confidential bilateral talk with Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in Brisbane. She accused the Russian President of breaking international law and endangering peace in Europe by destabilizing not only Ukraine, but also Georgia, Moldavia and potentially Serbia (FAZ 2014).

Second, advocacy networks such as the G4 are foreign policy networks among peers linked by common interests in global politics. The origins of such networks primarily stem from soft balancing coalitions; their membership consists mainly of non-status-quo powers. And third, substitution networks as the G20 are the product of the systematic pressures generated by rising powers. They have a mixed membership of established and rising powers and claim to be universally representative. Substitution networks have as their aim the replacement of formal institutions.

The competitive advantages of network powers arise, at least in part, from their privileged access to information. The more network links state actors build, the more powerful and autonomous they will potentially be (Slaughter 2009, 112). In addition, the experiences of cooperation and shared learning processes among network powers allow them to relate to each other on the basis of greater credibility and predictability in their reciprocal behavior. These comparative advantages are most pronounced – and the position of the broker state is most beneficial and influential – when only the actor can connect several clusters of states and resolve interconnected problems of multilateral coordination.

Germany has joined the foreign policy networks of both established and rising powers. Through the G4 it maintains “special relationships” with Brazil and India, and through the G8 Berlin regularly coordinates its global policies with the established great powers. The network analysis perspective suggests that midlevel, open and connected powers like Germany and the IBSA states in particular – skilled at building and exploiting their position in multiple networks – may gain global influence (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009, 572). Therefore, the asymmetry in influence (decision makers versus decision takers) vis-à-vis their regional neighbors, who are mostly excluded from global advocacy networks, will increase further.

Connectedness in international relations results from establishing multiple network links and leads to the the ability to hold privileged roles as bridge-builders and agenda-setters, which can be decisive power resources in the changing global order. Powerful states in prestigious network positions incrementally become the destination of cooperation proposals and, consequently, have to bear lower search costs than others (Flemes 2013, 1030). Conversely, network opportunities decrease with an increase in the number of hostile relations that exist with single major powers. In this regard, Germany, Brazil and South Africa are all on good terms with the established great powers. This may partially compensate for their hard power deficiencies compared to China and India – both of which maintain a competitive relationship with each other (besides the several further constraints existing in the Asian security cluster). However, because of their multiple instances of friendly relations with their peers, network powers are actually relatively independent from single great powers—even though these great powers might command superior material resources (ibid.: 1027).

German foreign-policy makers are challenged by the complex interlinkages and interdependencies of the new world order just as decision makers in any other state. But three clusters of peculiarities of German foreign policy prepare Berlin to better utilize those interlinkages to actively shape the new global order.

First, a comparative advantage for Berlin in the course of the global transformation process outlined above might be that the new multipolarity and the resulting patterns of interaction (such as the increasing need to build multilateral compromise) are deeply rooted in Germany’s political system and its vision of international politics. International consensus power – understood as controlling and timing the agenda to permanently compromise on the resulting consensus – finds a domestic equivalent in the German political system: the politics of the third way (Czempiel 1999). The domestic culture of power sharing is the result of processes of permanent bargaining and consensus seeking, which are the result of a political system based on federalism, coalition governments and social partnership between labor unions and business associations known as communitarian

corporatism (Katzenstein 1997). This domestic experience influences the structural disposition for similar approaches to solving international problems (Staack 2007, 92). The decentralization of German political power after World War II was a key concern of the Anglo-American occupying authorities, who believed that a centralized German state could lead to the resurrection of military power.

Second, European multipolarity in general, and the EU institutions in particular, have socialized Germany's foreign policy elites. The intergovernmental pillars of the EU can be seen as a laboratory of the networked world order, while the widely accepted EU 3 network (i.e., Germany, France and the United Kingdom) has long been playing a decisive part in European security affairs.

Third, the specific composition of German foreign policy resources with its distinguished weight of ideational capabilities (e.g., international recognition, legitimacy and moral authority) enables Berlin to build consensus in the context of intergovernmental networks.

In the networked world order, consensual and co-optive strategies are and increasingly will be pivotal for conducting diplomacy effectively. In this regard, the German foreign policy approach toward states that are driven by divergent norms and values (e.g., Iran, Russia, and China) is largely based on operationalizing ideational resources, trying to convince, persuade or co-opt them, including them in multilateral contexts, relying on the socializing effects of value-driven reciprocity.

Moreover, Berlin is increasingly looking to project strategic assets such as the country's cutting edge in green economy as well as its excellence in industries, science and innovation through advocacy networks. As Germany forms security alliances with some states and trades with others, it will have to form distinct networks to pursue its climate- and currency-related interests. In the context of the middle power concept, similar foreign policy behavior has been framed as "niche diplomacy" (Cooper 1997) or "functional leadership" (Wood 1988, 3). These attributes are ascribed to states that cannot act effectively alone, but may have a systemic impact in a small group of states and through the employment of their specific capabilities (e.g., peacekeeping) or expertise in specific issue areas (e.g., nuclear nonproliferation). In this regard, it might even be possible to conceive of different major power hierarchies across various issues areas. For instance, both Brazilian and Japanese foreign policies have sought to achieve major power status in climate change politics (Barros-Platiau 2010; Kanie 2011).

The situation will become more complicated following the extension of the G20 agenda beyond purely economic and financial issues. At the G20 summit, held in Seoul in 2010, global problems such as corruption, energy and food security were also discussed. In the post-Copenhagen context, analysts and diplomats have



looked to the G20 as an alternative forum in which to break the current deadlock between the United States, the EU, and the BASIC network. At the 2012 summit in Los Cabos, the Mexican presidency highlighted developmental policies, whereas Russia's G20 presidency in 2013 focused on energy sustainability, but ended up debating a global security issue (Syria conflict). The G20 summit in Brisbane in 2014 was marked by the Ukraine crisis and public considerations by the Australian government to exclude the Russian President Putin from the summit, while the 2015 summit in Antalya focused on terrorism, migration, and climate change. Global health and trade are other potential issue areas that might be negotiated through the G20. An extended G20 agenda can turn the summits into locations of highly complex cross-issue bargaining – for instance, cutbacks in agricultural subsidies in return for the reduction of CO2 emissions.

At the individual analysis level, the informal and situational character of network bargains strengthens the role of political leaders and the impact of their personalities with the respective abilities to negotiate, identify windows of opportunity and manage different communication ties at the same time. At the (inter)state level, governments have to meet two preconditions to not be taken advantage of by their counterparts in the course of cross-policy negotiations. First, there is an increasing need for the coordination and formulation of competence guidelines for foreign policy at the state level, because ministries of environment, health, foreign affairs and trade have to coordinate their specific interests so as to not be played off against each other in the course of multilateral cross-policy bargaining. Second, before being able to build cross-issue coalitions, a state has to find those players that share issue-specific interests and form alliances with them (Flemes 2013, 1030–31).

As mentioned above, the German government has formulated strategy papers for different internationalizing policies. One key example of a policy-specific network seeking to put these policy guidelines into operation is the Renewables Club. On the invitation of Germany's then environment minister, Peter Altmaier, representatives from 10 countries gathered in Berlin in June 2013 to establish the foreign policy network. In addition to Germany, the club's heavyweights are China, France, India, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Believing themselves to be policy pioneers, the common goal of these governments is to scale up the deployment of renewable energy worldwide.

In March 2013, the fourth Petersberg Climate Dialogue took place in Berlin. Under the heading "Shaping the future", Germany and Poland invited 35 ministers from around the world to build consensus on the long-term climate goals to be discussed at the 2013 UN climate summit in Warsaw. The Ministry of Education and Research promotes multilateral cooperation in science, innovation and technology as part of its efforts to build networks and strategic partnerships that



“strengthen Germany’s role in the global knowledge society” (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2008). Another potential area for network building is the fight against transnational organized crime, where Germany could work with the key production, transit and consumer countries of cocaine – Colombia, Brazil and Spain – for more effective measures against drug trafficking and money laundering by connecting European and South American security governance schemes (Flesmes and Radseck 2013).

## **Conclusion**

This article contributed to understanding Germany’s recent foreign policy reorientation in the context of major domestic and international political changes by developing the concept of ‘network power’. According to a 2016 study by McKinsey, a consultancy firm, amidst an unprecedented expansion of the global network of goods, services, finance, people, and data and community, Germany is the world’s fourth most connected state (adjusted for country size) (McKinsey Global Institute 2016, 12). Given its relatively great stakes in the stability of its networks, Germany’s foreign policy is thus bound to change. Based on a distinction between mediation, advocacy, and substitution networks, an analysis of German foreign policy activities within these networks illustrated the increasing relative weight of network connectivity as compared to alternative power resources. In addition, the paper highlighted that Germany is set to benefit from the growing importance of network connectivity.

How Berlin utilizes this comparative advantage in the future depends on its ability to balance its traditional foreign policy pillars, e.g. strong German-French and transatlantic partnerships and Europeanized interests, with evolving priorities regarding maintaining influence in new formal and informal institutions. If the German government manages to reconcile both prerogatives, it has an opportunity to turn Germany’s ‘unipolar moment’ in Europe into value-oriented and interest-driven network power that can contribute to the development of a new global order.

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